

A GARDEN PLOT

(Continued from Page Seven.)

"About two days arter I threw mine over my back fence," says Henery Walker, speaking very slowly.

"Ho," ses Bob, surprised. "I didn't know you 'ad any geraniums, Henery. I thought you was digging for gravel this year."

"Henery didn't answer 'im. Not because 'e didn't want to, mind you, but because he couldn't."

"That one," ses Bob, pointing at a broken geranium with the stem of 'is pipe, 'is a "Dook o' Wellington," and that white one there is wot I'm going to call "Pretty's Pride." That fine marigold over there, wot looks like a sunflower, is called "Golden Dreams."

"Come along, Henery," ses Bill Chambers, bursting, 'come and get something to take the taste out of your mouth."

"I'm sorry I can't offer you a flower for your button-hole," ses Bob, peritely, 'but it's getting so near the Flower Show now I can't afford it. If you chaps only knew wot pleasure was to be 'ad sitting among your innercent flowers, you wouldn't want to go to the public-house so often."

"He shook 'is 'ead at 'em, and telling his wife to give the 'Dook o' Wellington a mug of water, sat down in the chair agin and wiped the sweat off 'is brow."

"Bill Chambers did a bit o' thinking as they walked up the road, and by and by 'e turns to Joe Gubbins and 'e ses:

"Seen anything o' George English lately, Joe?"

"Yes," ses Joe.

"Seems to me we all 'ave," ses Sam Jones.

"None of 'em liked to say wot was in their minds, 'aving all seen George English and swore pretty strong not to tell his secret, and none of 'em liking to own up that they'd been digging up their gardens to get money as 'e'd told 'em about. But presently Bill Chambers ses:

"Without telling no secrets or breaking no promises, Joe, supposing a certain 'ouse was mentioned in a certain letter from furrin parts, wot 'ouse was it?"

"Supposing it was so," ses Joe, careful too;

"the second 'ouse counting from the Cauliflower."

"The ninth 'ouse, you mean," ses Henery Walker, sharply.

"Second 'ouse in Mill Lane, you mean," ses Sam Jones, wot lived there.

"Then they all see 'ow they'd been done, and that they wasn't, in a manner o' speaking, referring to the same letter. They came up and sat 'ere where we're sitting now, all dazed-like. It wasn't only the chance o' losing the prize that upset 'em, but they'd wasted their time and ruined their gardens and got called mad by the other folks. Henery Walker's state o' mind was dreadful to see, and he's kep' thinking of 'orrible things to say to George English, and then belag afraid they wasn't strong enough."

"While they was talking who should come along but George English hisself! He came right up to the table, and they all sat back on the bench and stared at 'im fierce, and Henery Walker crinkled 'is nose at 'im."

"Evening," he ses, but none of 'em answered 'im; they all looked at Henery to see wot 'e was

going to say.

"Wot's up?" ses George, in surprise.

"Gardens," ses Henery.

"So I've 'eard," ses George.

"He shook 'is 'ead and looked at them sorrowful and severe at the same time."

"So I 'eard, and I couldn't believe my ears till I went and looked for myself," he ses, 'and wot I want to say is this: you know wot I'm referring to. If any man 'as found wot don't belong to 'im 'e knows who to give it to. It ain't wot I should 'ave expected of men wot's lived in the same place as me for years. Talk about honesty,' 'e ses, shaking 'is head agin, 'I should like to see a little of it."

"Peter Smith opened his mouth to speak, and 'ardly knowing wot 'e was doing took a pull at 'is beer at the same time, and if Sam Jones 'adn't been by to thump 'im on the back I b'lieve 'e'd ha' died there and then."

"Mark my words," ses George English, speaking very slow and solemn, 'there'll be no blessing on it. Whoever's made 'is fortune by getting up and digging 'is garden over won't get no real benefit from it. 'E may wear a black coat and new trousers on Sunday, but 'e won't be 'appy. I'll go and get my little taste o' beer somewhere else,' 'e ses. 'I can't breathe here."

"He walked off before any one could say a word; Bill Chambers dropped 'is pipe and smashed it. Henery Walker sat staring after 'im with 'is mouth wide open, and Sam Jones, who was always one to take advantage, drank 'is own beer under the firm belief that it was Joe's."

"I shall take care that Mrs. Pawlett 'ears o' this," ses Henery, at last.

"And be asked wot you dug your garden up for," ses Joe, 'and 'ave to explain that you broke your promise to George. Why, she'd talk at us for years and years."

"And parson 'ud preach a sermon about it," ses Sam; 'where's your sense, Henery?"

"We should be the larking stock for miles round," ses Bill Chambers. "If anybody wants to know, I dug my garden up to enrich the soil for next year, and also to give some other chap a chance of the prize."

"Peter Smith 'as always been a unfortunat man; 'e's got the name for it. He was just 'aving another drink as Bill said that, and this time we all thought 'e'd gone. He did hisself."

"Mrs. Pawlett and the parson came 'ome next day, and 'er voice got that squeaky with surprise it was painful to listen to her. All the chaps stuck to the tale that they'd dug their garden up to give the others a chance, and Henery Walker, 'e went further and said it was owing to a sermon on unselfishness wot the curate 'ad preached three weeks afore. 'E 'ad a nice little red-covered 'ymn book the next day with 'From a Friend' wrote in it."

"All things considered, Mrs. Pawlett was for doing away with the Flower Show that year and giving two prizes next year instead, but one or two other chaps, encouraged by Bob's example, 'ad given in their names, too, and they said it wouldn't be fair to their wives. All the gardens out one was worse than Bob's, they not having started till later than wot 'e did, and not being able to get their geraniums from 'is florist. The only better garden was Ralph Thomson's, who lived next door to 'im, but two nights afore the

Flower Show 'is pig got walking in its 'ole Ralph said it was a mystery to 'im 'ow the could ha' got out; it must ha' put its foot thro a hole too small for it, and turned the butte its door, and then climbed over a four-foot fence. He told Bob 'e wished the pig could speak. Bob said that that was sinful and unchristian 'im, and that most likely if it could, it would call 'im a lot o' bad names, and ask 'im wh didn't feed it properly."

"There was quite a crowd on Flower Show following the judges. First of all, to Bill Chambers' astonishment and surprise, they went to place and stood on the 'eaps in 'is garden jud 'em, while Bill peeped at 'em through the kit winder 'arf-crazy. They went to every garden the place, until one of the young ladies got of it, and asked Mrs. Pawlett whether they there to judge cottage gardens or earthquakes."

"Everybody 'eld their breaths that evening the school room when Mrs. Pawlett got up on platform and took a slip of paper from one of judges. She stood a moment waiting for silence, and then 'eld up her 'and to stop what thought was clapping at the back, but which two or three wimmen who 'ad 'ad to take crying babies out trying to quiet 'em in the p. Then Mrs. Pawlett put 'er glasses on 'er nose just read out, short and sweet, that the prize three sovereigns and a metal teapot for the kept cottage garden 'ad been won by Mr. Ralph Thomson."

"One or two people patted Bob on the back 'e walked up the middle to take the prize; one or two more did, and Bill Chambers' pat the 'earliest of 'em all. Bob stopped and s to 'im about it."

"You would 'ardly think that Bob 'ud ha' cheek to stand up there and make a speech, but did. He said it gave 'im great pleasure to take teapot and the money, and the more pleasure cause 'e felt that 'e 'ad earned 'em. 'E said if 'e told 'em all 'e'd done to make sure o' prize they'd be surprised. 'E said that 'e'd like Ralph Thomson's pig, up early and late."

"He stood up there talking as though 'e never going to leave off, and said that 'e hoped 'is example would be of benefit to 'is neigh. Some of 'em seemed to think that digging everything, but 'e could say with pride th 'adn't put a spade to 'is garden for three y until a week ago, and then not much."

"He finished 'is remarks by saying that 'e going to give a tea-party up at the Cauliflower christen the teapot, where 'e'd be pleased to come all friends. Quite a crowd got up and lowed 'im out then, instead o' waiting for the solving views, and came back 'arf an 'our a wards, saying that until they'd got as far as Cauliflower they'd no idea as Bob was so tikler who 'e mixed with."

"That was the last Flower Show we ever 'ad Claybury, Mrs. Pawlett and the judges mee the tea-party coming 'ome, and 'aving to get a gate into a field to let it pass. What with and Mrs. Pawlett tumbling over something ther up the road, which turned out to be the pot, smelling strong with beer, the Flower S was given up, and the parson preached th Sundays running on the sin of beer-drinking children who'd never 'ad any and wimmen couldn't get it."

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